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LB 543

Select File for specific amendment AM1894. (Legislative Journal page 1873.)

PRESIDENT MAURSTAD: We remain under Final Reading. Senator Chambers, you're recognized on your motion to return.

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Thank you, Mr. President. Members of the Legislature, this amendment goes to the Postsecondary Education Award Program, PEAP. And what my amendment would do is to eliminate the increase which has been given to that program. With this increase, that money to these private schools will be \$3,184,000, I think. I want to stop this runaway appropriation of money to this church school fund. I have declared my intention to challenge in court whether or not the Legislature can set aside a fund exclusively for private and parochial schools. I don't believe constitutionally that can be done. The Legislature does not have what it takes to abolish this program. That's what I think ought to be done. In the mean time, however, this amendment would say, don't give them an increase. Let them have what would remain, which would be for one year, \$2,434,000, \$2,434,000, close to two and a half million dollars, which in my opinion, if it's available, should go to the public schools. What makes this whole approach so insidious is that there are three funds that offer assistance of this kind. One of the others is known as the State Scholarship Award Program. The second is the Scholarship Assistant Program...Assistance Program. Both of those are available to students going to public schools. They are also available to students going to private schools. When we come to the fund that is the subject of my amendment, public school students have no access to that money. Now that it has been brought to our attention and discussed repeatedly this session, we ought to take away that increase in funding which is offered by this bill. I'm not trying to do with this amendment what I think needs to be done, that is to eliminate all funding. And the next step is to eliminate the program from the statutes. But I know the Legislature will not do that. So this amendment simply takes away the increase. And how much is that increase? Seven hundred fifty thousand dollars for this year and next year. That is way too much money to be spent in this unfair, in my mind unconstitutional manner. When I asked various senators